teams provides a clear example. A number of large non–Native American corporations and institutions, including schools and colleges, have fraudulently claimed a connection to Indigenous people and their cultures, religious practices, symbols, and crafts for commercial profit. The National Football League's Washington Commanders, for instance, used a racial slur directed at Native Americans as its team name for eighty-seven years. The team placed that slur and other Native American images on helmets, uniforms, tickets, merchandise, and advertising, generating enormous profits for the team's owners and shareholders while denigrating and damaging the broader Native American community. The team dropped the offensive name in 2020 after years of widespread protests and condemnation by Native Americans and their allies.

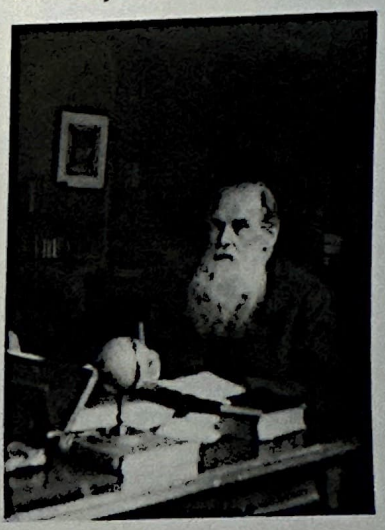
As we will discuss later in this chapter, power is key to analyzing the dynamics of cultural appropriation. Appropriation occurs when a more powerful group takes aspects of a subordinate group's culture for personal or corporate gain, using those taken elements in ways considered offensive to members of the source community. In the process of cultural appropriation, the taking group improves its status and power while creating negative consequences for the group of origin: harmful stereotypes; stripping of heritage, artifacts, and resources; and a deep sense of grief, loss, and violation (Jackson 2021).

How Has the Culture Concept Developed in Anthropology?

» Outline the historical development of the culture concept.

The concept of culture has been central to anthropology ever since the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) crafted his definition in the opening paragraph of his 1871 book *Primitive Culture*: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor.



Tylor understood culture to be a unified and complex system of ideas and behavior learned over time, passed down from generation to generation, and shared by members of a particular group. Over the past century and a half, culture has become more than a definition; it is now a key theoretical framework for anthropologists attempting to understand humans and their interactions.

Early Evolutionary Frameworks

Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer (1854–1941) of England and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) of the United States were among the leading early anthropologists who worked to professionalize a field long dominated by

wealthy collectors of artifacts. They sought to organize the vast quantities of data about the diversity of cultures worldwide that were being accumulated through colonial and missionary enterprises during the nineteenth century. These anthropologists were influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution, which maintains that the diversity of biological species resulted from gradual change over time in response to environmental pressures. Thus, they suggested that the vast diversity of cultures represented different stages in the evolution of human culture.

unilineal cultural evolution: The theory proposed by nineteenth-century anthropologists that all cultures naturally evolve through the same sequence of stages from simple to complex.

Early anthropologists suggested that all cultures would naturally evolve through the same sequence of stages, a concept known as **unilineal cultural evolution.** They set about plotting the world's cultures along a continuum from most simple to most complex using the terms *savage*, *barbarian*, and *civilized*. Western cultures were, perhaps too predictably, considered the most evolved or civilized. By arranging cultures along this continuum, early anthropologists believed that they could trace the path of human cultural evolution, understand where some cultures had come from, and predict where other cultures were headed.

Tylor and others developed the theory of unilineal cultural evolution at least in part to combat the prevalent racist belief that many non-Europeans were of a different species. Today, however, the theory has been criticized as racist itself for ranking different cultural expressions in a hierarchy, with European culture, considered the ideal, at the apex (Stocking 1968). Franz Boas, a key figure in American anthropology, and Bronisław Malinowski, a Polish anthropologist who spent most of his life teaching in England, represent two main schools of anthropology that moved beyond the evolutionary framework for viewing cultural differences.

American Historical Particularism

Franz Boas (1858–1942) conducted fieldwork among the Kwakiutl Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada before becoming a professor of anthropology at Columbia University in New York and a curator of the American Museum of Natural History. Boas rejected unilineal cultural evolution, its generalizations, and its comparative method. Instead, he advocated for an approach that today we call **historical particularism.** He claimed that cultures arise from different causes, not uniform processes. According to Boas, anthropologists could not rely on an evolutionary formula to explain differences among cultures and instead must study the particular history of each culture to see how it developed. Evolutionists such as Tylor, Frazer, and Morgan argued that similarities among cultures emerged through independent invention as different cultures independently arrived at similar solutions to similar problems. Boas, in contrast, while not ruling out some independent invention, turned to the idea of diffusion—the borrowing of cultural traits and patterns from other cultures—to explain apparent similarities.

historical particularism: The idea, attributed to Franz Boas, that cultures develop in specific ways because of their unique histories.

Boas's belief in the powerful role of culture in shaping human life is evident in his early twentieth-century studies of immigrants. His research with the children of immigrants from Europe revealed the remarkable effects of culture and environment on their physical forms, challenging the role of biology as a tool for discrimination. As a Jewish immigrant himself, Boas was particularly sensitive to the dangers of racial stereotyping, and his work throughout his career served to challenge White supremacy, the inferior ranking of non-European people, and other expressions of racism.

Boas's students Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) and Margaret Mead (1901–1978) continued his emphasis on the powerful role of culture in shaping human life and the need to explore the unique development of each culture. Benedict's popular studies *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) explored how cultural traits and entire cultures are uniquely patterned and integrated. Mead conducted research in Samoa, Bali, and Papua New Guinea and became perhaps the most famous anthropologist of the twentieth century, promoting her findings and the unique tools of anthropology to the general American public.

American anthropologist Ruth Benedict.

Mead turned her attention particularly to enculturation and its powerful effects on cultural patterns and personality types. In her book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), she explored the seeming sexual freedom and experimentation of Samoan young people and compared it with the repressed sexuality of young people in the United States, suggesting the important role of enculturation in shaping behavior—even behavior that is imagined to have powerful biological origins. Mead's controversial research and findings throughout her career challenged biological assumptions about gender, demonstrating cross-cultural variations in expressions of what it meant to be male or female and contributing to heated debates about the roles of women and men in U.S. culture in the twentieth century.

British Structural Functionalism

Between the 1920s and 1960s, in a rejection of unilineal cultural evolution, many British social anthropologists viewed anthropology more as a science and fieldwork more as a science experiment that could focus on the specific details of a local **society**. These anthropologists viewed human societies as living organisms, and through fieldwork they sought to analyze each part of the "body." Each aspect of society—including kinship, religious, political, and economic structures—fit together and had its unique function within the larger structure. Like a living organism, a society worked to maintain an internal balance, or equilibrium, that kept the system working. Under this conceptual framework, called **structural functionalism**, British social anthropologists employed a synchronic approach in order to control their science experiments—analyzing contemporary societies

society: The focus of early British anthropological research whose structure and function could be isolated and studied scientifically.

structural functionalism: A conceptual framework positing that each element of society serves a particular function to keep the entire system in equilibrium.

at a fixed point in time without regard to historical context. By isolating as many variables as possible, especially by excluding history and outside influences such as neighboring groups or larger national or global dynamics, these anthropologists sought to focus narrowly on the culture at hand.

Early practitioners of this approach included Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), who drew on his own work among the Indigenous people of the Andaman Islands of India (1922) and of Australia (1930), and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973) and his classic ethnography of the Sudan, *The Nuer* (1940), which we will consider further in Chapters 3 and 10. Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) used an early form of functionalism in his ethnography of the Trobriand Islands, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Later, British anthropologists, including Max Gluckman (1911–1975) in his work on rituals of rebellion and Victor Turner (1920–1983) in his work on religious symbols and rituals, critiqued earlier structural functionalists for ignoring the dynamics of conflict, tension, and change within the societies they studied. Their intervention marked a significant turn in the study of society and culture by British anthropologists.

Culture and Meaning

One predominant view within anthropology in recent decades sees culture primarily as a set of ideas or knowledge shared by a group of people that provides a common body of information about how to behave, why to behave that way, and what that behavior means. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926–2006), a key figure in this **interpretivist approach**, urged anthropologists to explore culture primarily as a symbolic system in which even simple, seemingly straightforward actions can convey deep meanings.

interpretivist approach: A conceptual framework that sees culture primarily as a symbolic system of deep meaning.

In a classic example, Geertz (1973c) examines the difference between a wink and a twitch of the eye. Both involve the same movement of eye muscles, but a wink carries a meaning, which can change depending on the context in which it occurs—it may imply flirting, including a friend in a secret, or slyly signaling agreement. Deciphering a wink's meaning requires a complex, collective (shared) understanding of unspoken communication in a specific cultural context. Collective understandings of symbols and symbolic actions enable people to interact with one another in subtle yet complex ways without constantly stopping to explain themselves.

MAP 2.1
Bali

Geertz's essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (1973a) describes in intricate detail a cockfight—a common activity even today in local communities across Bali, a small island in the South Pacific. Geertz describes the elaborate breeding, raising, and training of the roosters; the scene of bedlam at the fight; the careful selection of the birds; the rituals of the knife man, who provides the razors for the birds' feet; the fight itself; the raucous betting before

and during the fight; and the aftermath, with the cutting up of the losing cock and the dividing of its parts among participants in the fight.

Geertz argues that such careful description of cultural activity is an essential part of understanding Balinese culture. But it is not enough. He claims that we must engage in **thick description**, looking beneath the surface activities to see the layers of deep cultural meaning in which those activities are embedded. The cockfight is not simply a cockfight. It also represents generations of competition among the village families for prestige, power, and resources within the community. It symbolizes the negotiation of those families' prestige status and standing within the larger groups. For Geertz, all activities of the cockfight reflect these profound webs of meaning, and their analysis requires extensive description that uncovers those meanings. Indeed, according to Geertz, every cultural action is more than the action itself; it is also a symbol of deeper meaning.

Preparations for a cockfight outside a Hindu temple in Bali. How do you analyze the deep webs of meaning at play in any cultural event?

thick description: A research strategy that combines detailed description of cultural activity with an analysis of the layers of deep cultural meaning in which those activities are embedded.

Geertz's culture concept has provided a key theoretical framework for anthropological research. But, as we will see in the following section, it has also been criticized for not adequately considering the relations of power within cultures and the contested processes by which cultural meanings—norms, values, symbols, mental maps of reality—are established.

How Are Culture and Power Related?

» Describe the ways that power is embedded in the culture concept.

As you have just read, anthropologists for many years focused primarily on culture as a system of ideas. But more recent scholarship has pushed anthropology to consider the deep interconnections between culture and power in more sophisticated ways (Foucault 1977; Gramsci 1971; Wolf 1982), and the chapters of this book take this challenge seriously.

power: The ability or potential to bring about change through action or influence.

Power is often described as the ability or potential to bring about change through action or influence, either one's own or that of a group or institution. This may include the ability to influence through force or the threat of force. Power is embedded in many kinds of social relations, from interpersonal relations, to institutions, to structural frameworks of whole societies. In effect, power is everywhere, and individuals participate in systems of power in complex ways. Throughout this book, we will work to unmask the dynamics of power that are central to all aspects of culture, including race and racism, ethnicity and nationalism, gender, human sexuality, economics, and family.

Anthropologist Eric Wolf (1923–1999) urged anthropologists to see power as an aspect of all human relationships. Consider the relationships in your own life: teacher/student, parent/child, employer/employee, landlord/tenant, lender/borrower, boyfriend/girlfriend. Wolf (1990, 1999) argued that all such human relationships have a power dynamic. Though cultures are often assumed to be composed of groups of similar people who uniformly share norms and values, in reality people in any given culture are usually diverse, and their relationships are complicated.

stratification: The uneven distribution of resources and privileges among members of a group or culture.

Power in a culture reflects **stratification**—uneven distribution of resources and privileges among the culture's members—that often persists over generations. Some people are drawn into the center of the culture. Others are ignored, marginalized, or even annihilated. Power may be stratified along lines of gender, racial or ethnic group, class, age, family, religion, sexuality, or legal status. These structures of power organize relationships among people and create a framework through which access to cultural resources is distributed. As a result, some people are able to participate more fully in the culture than others. This balance of power is not fixed; it fluctuates. By examining how the resources, privileges, and opportunities of a culture are shared unevenly and unequally, we can begin to use culture as a conceptual guide to power and its workings.

Power and Cultural Institutions

One key to understanding the relationship between culture and power is to recognize that a culture is more than just a set of ideas or patterns of behavior shared among a collection of individuals. A culture also includes the powerful institutions that these people create to promote and maintain their core values. Ethnographic research must consider a wide range of institutions that play central roles in the enculturation process. For example, schools teach a shared history, language, patterns of social interaction, notions of health, and scientific ideas of what exists in the world and how the world works. Religious institutions promote moral and ethical codes of behavior. The media convey images of what is considered normal and valued. Other prominent cultural institutions that reflect and shape norms and values include the family, medicine, government, courts, police, and the military.

These cultural institutions are also locations where people can debate and contest cultural norms and values. In 2003, an intense debate erupted in France about Muslim girls wearing headscarves to public schools. Although few girls actually wore headscarves, the controversy took on particular intensity in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and terrorist incidents in Europe. For many non-Muslim people in France, the wearing of head coverings represented a grave danger to French society, particularly its commitment to equality for women, its history of ethnic assimilation, and its tradition of the separation of church and state. Passage of a law banning the headscarf from public schools was intended as a signal (to people both inside and outside France) of the country's commitment to these principles. But many Muslim girls believed that wearing the headscarf also expressed a commitment to French values—the country's commitment to religious freedom and liberty.

A young Muslim woman with two French flags pulled over her head covering marches in Paris against a French ban on religious symbols, including headscarves, in public schools.

Despite legal challenges, strikes by students, and street demonstrations in opposition to the law, in 2004 the French government banned any clothing in public schools that indicates particular religious beliefs. Although the language of the law was broadly stated to include all religions, everyone understood that Muslim girls' headscarves were the target. France's public schools had become the venue for debating, contesting, and enforcing key French cultural norms and values (Bowen 2006). As we will see, cultural institutions such as schools are not only places where norms are enforced but also places where powerful ideas of what is normal and natural are shaped. Do you see parallels to current U.S. debates about mask mandates and mask wearing in public schools?

Hegemony

The Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) described two aspects of power. *Material power*, the first component, includes political, economic, or military power. It exerts itself through coercion or brute force. The second aspect of power involves the ability to create consent and agreement within a population, a condition that Gramsci (1971) called **hegemony**.

hegemony: The ability of a dominant group to create consent and agreement within a population without the use or threat of force.

Gramsci recognized the tremendous power of culture—particularly the cultural institutions of media, schools, and religion—to shape what people think is normal, natural, and possible and thereby directly influence the scope of human action and interaction. Cultures, which develop slowly over time,

include a shared belief system of what is right, what is wrong, and what is normal and appropriate. In this hegemony of ideas, some thoughts and actions become unthinkable, and group members develop a set of "beliefs" about what is normal and appropriate that come to be seen as natural "truths." The French sociologist Michel Foucault (1926–1984), in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), described this hegemonic aspect of power as the ability to make people discipline their own behavior so that they believe and act in certain "normal" ways, often against their own interests, even without a tangible threat of punishment for misbehavior.

This hegemony of expectations shapes our daily life choices without our awareness, delineating in our imaginations what is possible, permissible, right, and wrong. We consent and self-discipline without obvious external enforcement. On a small scale, we buckle our seatbelts without physical coercion. We stop at red traffic lights even in the absence of oncoming cars, police, or surveillance cameras. By April 15 each year, we pay our taxes of our own volition—grumbling perhaps—but without a tax collector coming to the door. On a more complex level, hegemonic concepts of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality constrain our choices of who we love and marry.

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed anti-miscegenation laws in the history of the United States. These laws drew upon cultural beliefs in "natural" biological differences among races and the seemingly unnatural, deviant practice of intermarriage. Despite the elimination of these formal laws, a certain hegemony of thought remains: Many in U.S. culture still see interracial marriage as unthinkable and undoable. As evidence, consider U.S. intermarriage rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), there were 5,818,000 interracial married couples in 2016, only 10.2 percent percent of all marriages in the United States.

Clearly, although U.S. culture has very few formal rules about whom one can marry, cultural norms combined with long-term geographic and institutional patterns of segregation still powerfully inform and enforce our behavior. As this example shows, views against interracial marriage do not require legal sanction to remain dominant, hegemonic norms.

Human Agency

Although hegemony can be very powerful, it does not completely dominate people's thinking. Individuals and groups have the power to contest cultural norms, values, mental maps of reality, symbols, institutions, and structures of power—a potential known as **agency**. Cultural beliefs and practices are not timeless; they change and can be changed. Cultures are not biologically determined; they are created over time by particular groups of people. By examining human agency, we see how culture serves as a realm in which battles over power

agency: The potential power of individuals and groups to contest cultural norms, values, mental maps of reality, symbols, institutions, and structures of power.

take place—where people debate, negotiate, contest, and enforce what is considered normal, what people can say, do, and even think.

Although a culture's dominant group may have greater access to power, resources, rights, or privileges, the systems of power such groups create are never absolute, and their dominance is never complete. Individuals and groups with less power or no power may contest the dominant power relationships and structures, whether through political, economic, religious, or military means. At times, these forms of resistance are visible, public, and well organized, including negotiations, protests, strikes, or rebellions. At other times, the resistance may be more subtle, discreet, and diffuse.

For example, James Scott's book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) identifies strategies that people in very weak positions use to express their agency and to resist the dominant group. Scott focuses on a village in northwestern Malaysia that underwent rapid economic transformation as a result of technological changes in the local rice-growing process. The introduction of large-scale irrigation, double cropping, and harvesting machines made harvests more plentiful but threw many landless farmers out of work. The changes benefited the village elite (mostly Chinese) and hurt the poor (mostly Malay). In light of these stark inequalities, Scott asks why poor farmers who are the majority do not revolt and overturn the social and economic order that has made them poor and kept them poor. Scott suggests that the poor farmers understand the potential risks of resistance and the dangerous consequences for themselves and their families that could result from a conflict with the rich and powerful minority. So, they often avoid obvious, public displays of resistance and choose subtler, nonconfrontational forms of resistance,

Resistance to unfair conditions takes many forms. (*Left*) Egyptian protestors in Tahrir Square, Cairo, demonstrate against their government. (*Right*) Malaysian farmers conduct a slowdown to protest working conditions.

MAP 2.2
Malaysia

including foot-dragging, slowdowns, theft, sabotage, trickery, arson, and false compliance with regulations.

Some scholars question whether these are really forms of resistance because they are not aimed at, and do not necessarily achieve, change. But Scott argues that not all resistance is revolutionary and that, over time, many acts of everyday resistance can bring change. Through these processes of contestation, norms, values, mental maps of reality, symbols, organizations, and institutions that appear to be timeless and accepted are actually undergoing constant change and renegotiation as people express their human agency even in the face of overwhelming displays of power.

How Much of Who You Are Is Shaped by Biology, and How Much by Culture?

» Explain how biology relates to culture and human behavior.

Biology is important. We live in our bodies, after all. We feel, smell, taste, hear, and see the world around us through our bodies. We communicate with and through our bodies. And we have certain biological drives that are essential for survival. All humans must eat, drink, and sleep. But current research in physical and cultural anthropology shows that no matter how strong our biological needs or our hormones, odors, and appetites might be, culture and the environment in which we live exert powerful influences on what we think, on how we behave, on the shape and functions of our individual bodies, and even on how humans have evolved over time.

Nature and Nurture

Popular discourse in the United States often assigns biology—and usually genes—the primary role in determining who we are. Anthropological research, however, consistently reveals the powerful roles that culture and environment together play in shaping our lives and bodies. Human genetic codes are 99.9 percent identical, so if behavior were entirely driven by our genes, we should expect to find very similar—even universal—behavioral responses to biological influences. Instead, we find remarkable physical and behavioral variety across cultures. Even the most basic human activities, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, are carried out in remarkably distinct ways. All humans must do these things. But shared biological needs do not ensure shared cultural patterns.

Of course, food and liquid enter the body through the mouth and get digested in the stomach and intestines. But what goes in and how it goes in are other stories. Perhaps you find dog or snake or pony to be inedible, although